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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of National Estimates

13 April 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

SUBJECT : Arab and Israeli Military Capabilities

1. As of the moment, Israeli superiority on the ground is sufficient to defeat decisively the Egyptian ground forces in the Sinai area, probably in a matter of two or three weeks. These Egyptian units constitute over half of Egypt's total ground forces and about 80 percent of its ground combat strength. We believe that Israel could defeat these forces while simultaneously holding off the Syrian army and Jordan's Arab Legion. Israel is also presently capable, if it chose to do so, of defeating the Arab Legion and occupying the west bank of the Jordan within a period of several days, while holding off Egyptian and Syrian ground forces. We believe that it will retain this superiority on the ground for the next two or three months at least, even if it fails to receive substantial additional materiel.

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2. Egypt has already absorbed sufficient Soviet-supplied aircraft so that -- barring an extraordinarily successful initial Israeli surprise attack on Egyptian bases -- it could inflict heavy damage on Israeli cities and some damage to Israeli supply and combat operations if all-out war broke out tomorrow. However, during the next two or three months at least it is unlikely that such Egyptian successes would prevent the Israelis from defeating the Egyptian ground forces or force Israel to sue for peace before its main tactical objectives had been obtained.

3. Egypt's air striking power lies mainly in its possession of 40-50 IL-28 light jet bombers, of which 23 are probably now flyable.\* While intelligence on the extent and quality of Egyptian air force training is extremely fragmentary, Egypt probably has enough personnel to utilize its flyable bombers in

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\* The term "flyable", which is used in the reports of the IAC Ad Hoc Working Group on the Arab-Israeli Situation, includes all planes which can be flown, whether or not they are combat-ready. There is thus far insufficient evidence to estimate how many of these planes are equipped and ready for combat.

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a number of raids against Israeli targets. In terms of jet fighters, Egypt is believed to have received as many as 70-80 MIG-15's, of which 37 are now considered flyable. It also has 70 older British jet fighters. Israel's jet fighter strength lies in its 42 Meteors and Ouragans, of which 35 are considered combat ready. It is due shortly to receive 12 French Mystère jet fighters.

4. Numbers of fighter aircraft do not, however, furnish an accurate index of relative Egyptian-Israeli air capabilities. Although Israel's present best jet fighters are not equal in performance to Egypt's MIG-15's, Israeli air force personnel are qualitatively much superior and Israel has a larger number of combat-ready pilots than all the Arab states. Israel's superiority in these respects would probably compensate to a considerable extent, in actual combat, for Egypt's advantage in materiel. Moreover, Egypt's inferior maintenance and training standards will continue to limit its air force's effectiveness, and its ability to conduct sustained operations will continue to be far lower than that of Israel. The air capabilities of other Arab states are relatively insignificant.

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5. Over-all, we agree [REDACTED]

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that Israel -- though probably suffering extensive bombing damage in any war from now on -- could still defeat the Arab armies if war occurred this spring or early summer, and thereafter until the end of the year could hold back an Arab attack. Whether or not the Arabs achieved actual superiority in the longer run would depend not only on the degree of Israeli success in securing additional arms but also on the extent to which the Arabs were able to overcome chronic weaknesses in tactical and technical proficiency, morale, and other factors in combat effectiveness.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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SHERMAN KENT  
Assistant Director  
National Estimates

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